

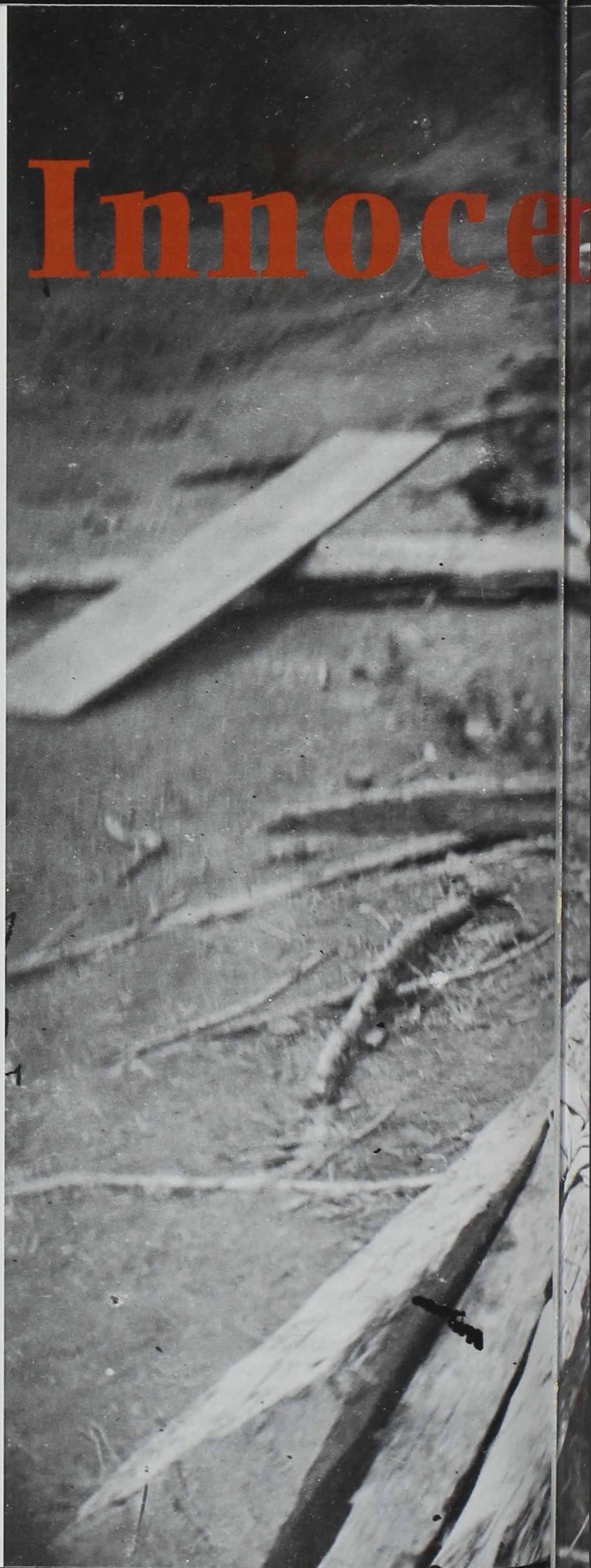
End of Innocence

by Sharon Ham

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Historians describe Pea Ridge as the culminating battle of the earliest campaign on the Civil War's bloody Western Front. In estimates of a battle's tactical importance and historical significance, the image of the individual soldier often fades. If lives are lost in combat, personal histories are too often buried in the discussions that follow. Through the welter of strategy and statistics, perhaps we can recover a part of the fading images of Isaac Arwine, John Cartwright, Isaac N., Stephen, and Vinson Holman, Pierce Walton, William Whisennand, John Leatherman, and Eli Holland.

Their fathers had been drawn to the fertile land of Iowa as theirs before them had been



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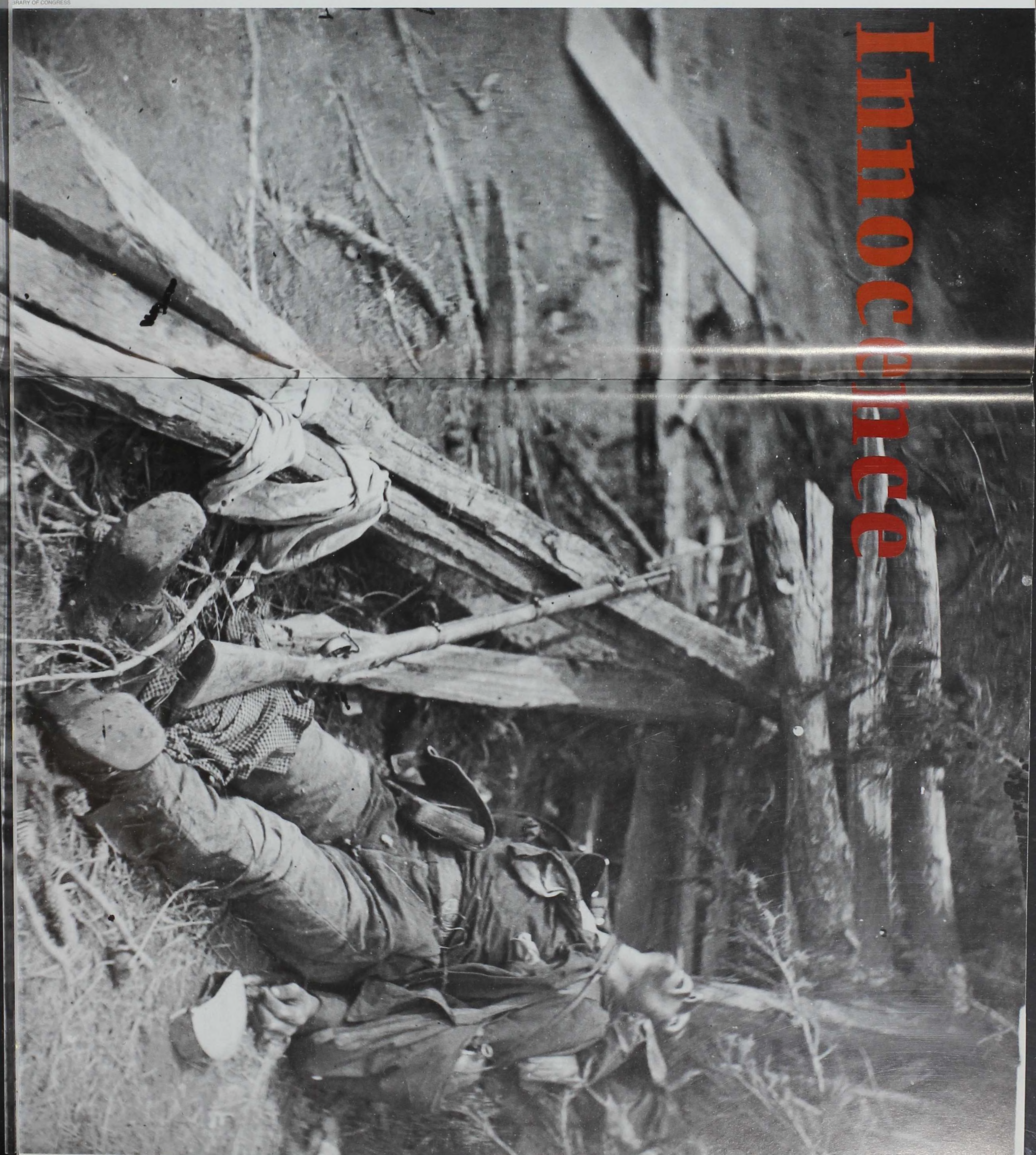
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drawn to Indiana and Ohio. They brought with them the agrarian values of their ancestors along with a deep religious faith, and they attempted to reconstruct in Iowa the communities they left behind. Soon after their arrival, they hewed farms from the wilderness, gathered themselves into congregations, built schools, and organized township governments, placing their hopes for the future in the families they raised. Partaking of the century-old American pioneer tradition, they brought to Iowa an abiding belief in the sanctity of their nation's Union.

Sometime before 1850, Henry M. Holman joined the mounting exodus from the states of the Old Northwest, bringing his family to Cedar County from Lawrence County, Indiana. That summer he rented a few acres of land in what would become four years later Newton Township, Buchanan County, and raised a log cabin. Son Vinson and his brother found employment making rail fences for a dollar a hundred. Over the next five years, Henry continually added to his farmstead, purchasing 40 acres for \$50 in September, 1852 and adding another 120 acres at \$220 in the next three years.

Within a year of his first purchase, sometime before February, 1853, Henry's brother Nathan, with his wife and children—among them sons Isaac and Stephen—arrived from Indiana. The two elder Holmans—Henry and Nathan—helped to organize the Christian Church on February 26, 1853. In August of '54 Nathan was elected one of the first judges for Newton Township, but like his brother Henry, Nathan's primary interest was in farming. Between May and August of 1855, he paid \$315 for 165 acres of land in Buchanan County.

Andrew Whisennand, Henry and Nathan's brother-in-law, came to Iowa in 1851. For \$145, he bought 80 acres in Spring Grove Township, Linn County and added 40 more in December, 1855 at a cost of \$75. Ten-year-old William, the second son among seven children, was expected to help his older brother feed and watch over the family's few cattle and hogs. Andrew's family probably joined the Christian Church founded by his brothers-in-law. In June, 1853—along with Henry Holman and a man named Long—Andrew Whisennand built a fish-trap dam across the Wapsipinicon River. Recognizing the area as a potential site for a water mill, the three men paid a \$60 entry fee to the Federal Land Office in Dubuque and an additional \$55 for 40 acres. They began operating the mill on September 5, 1855 at the site of present-day Troy Mills. By August of the year before, Andrew Whisennand had already been elected judge of nearby Newton Township at the same time his brother-in-law Nathan was elected.

Daniel Leatherman brought his wife and son to Iowa



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John Leatherman was 22 when he left tiny Spring Grove, Iowa, with eight other men for the Civil War. A year later he returned, "his body nearly wasted away."

from Allen County, Ohio around 1852. He first purchased 160 acres in Spring Grove Township for \$100 on January 25, 1853. Just over a year later he bought 20 acres in Newton for the same price. Daniel Leatherman died sometime in 1854, leaving his widow and a 15-year-old son John. After 1856 the boy was living with his mother and her new husband, but by 1860, John had left home to work as a hired man for a neighbor.

Like Leatherman, John Walton emigrated from Allen County, Ohio. He brought his family, including his son Pierce, to a ten-acre farm in Newton Township purchased from Reuben C. Walton, probably a relative who had settled in the area around 1847. In 1853, a Methodist congregation began meeting in Reuben's home, most likely attended by John and his family. In August, 1855 John had paid \$75 for his modest farm; by 1860, he owned real estate valued at \$2,000.

John Holland paid cash for his land, \$750 in February, 1856 for 135 acres in Newton. In April he paid \$250

cash for 75 acres in Linn County. On September 9, he added another 15 acres at \$150, also purchased with cash. Obviously a man of some means, an emigrant from Bedford, Lawrence County, Indiana, probably a Wesleyan Methodist, he brought with him to Iowa his son Eli. The Hollands may well have been related to the Holmans, since Eli—who would become a Methodist minister after the war—referred to an “Uncle Henry Holman” in a letter dated 1912.

The Turner Cartwright family came from Union County, Indiana around 1857. On Christmas of that year, Cartwright paid \$160 for 40 acres in Newton Township. He served as the second postmaster of Newton Center, although the exact years of his service are not known. His son John was about 16 when the family arrived in Iowa.

Isaac Arwine was born in Tennessee. Sometime before 1840, the Arwine family had moved to Lawrence County, Indiana. Isaac came to Iowa alone around 1855, and before the year was out married Nancy Jane Holman, Henry’s daughter. In 1856, Nancy gave birth to a son James. Arwine owned no property or real estate, but according to his great-granddaughter, he farmed with his father-in-law from the time of his marriage till his enlistment in the Union Army. Born on March 29, 1834, he was the oldest of the nine volunteers.

Nine families, whose individual lives were joined by blood, by marriage, by common origin, by shared business interest, and by the community they created from the land and spiritual values they shared, each sent their sons to war. Some died, some were wounded, others fell ill, all lost their innocence.

They came, and settled, and established themselves in the decade before the Civil War. Having only recently become a state, Iowa showed few of the ominous signs of the conflict to come. Its quiet prairies and gentle streams seemed far removed from the impassioned oratory of Washington and Charleston.

Before the outbreak of the War, life in the small settlement of Spring Grove was typical of life throughout

rural Iowa. Religion played a most important part in the day-to-day existence of these pioneers. At least seven of the nine young men fated for combat worshipped in the same church. Isaac, Vinson, and Stephen Holman were regular members of the Christian Church, as was most likely William Whisennand. In 1859, John Leatherman married Matilda Jane Peyton in the Christian Church organized by her father along with Henry and Nathan Holman. Isaac Arwine married regular church-member Nancy Jane Holman. John Cartwright’s father, Turner Cartwright, was a deacon, and in a letter home from the battlefield John referred to Christina Peyton’s prospective husband as “Brother” Huntington.

Fundamentalist in doctrine, practicing total-immersion baptism, with nine the usual age of acceptance, the church was organized along presbyterian lines. Each adult member had a vote on church business, including the choice of a new minister—though there was no real need for an ordained minister since any member was entitled to preach. Members found guilty of offenses against the church, such as swearing, dancing, gambling, and card playing, could be expelled by vote of the congregation. Sometimes, after doing penance, members were reinstated by the congregation.

But the most urgent moral issue of the day—slavery—did not seem a pressing concern for the church members. Nowhere in the letters from any member of the Christian Church—including those written after the start of the war from the Holmans, John Cartwright, and William Whisennand, fighting for the Union—is the cause of abolition championed. More than mere apathy, the lack of abolitionist fervor reveals a moral ambivalence. Stephen Holman wrote to Jane Peyton on August 5, 1862 about the “Damned Abolitionists”: “I will say no more on this, I am getting too harsh on them [slaves] . . . I am very much puzzled in regard to the war and slavery question and will leave that for you to settle.”

Slavery was a concern, however, for the Methodist organization in Spring Grove, founded sometime in 1858 by Charles and Martha Hoover. The Hoovers had withdrawn from the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1843 “on account of indifference toward the race of a darker

*“I am very much puzzled
in regard to the war and slavery question
and will leave that for you to settle.”*

color" within that fellowship, and they united with the Wesleyan Methodist Church. The members of the Hoover Church were active in the cause of abolition. In Stephen Holman's letter to Jane Peyton, he commented that "the freeing of the negroes is just what the Hooverites wants." Unlike Holman, Eli Holland, the future Methodist minister, seems to have known what he was fighting for. As he said in a letter long afterward, he had been fighting "to save the nation from the slave ologarchy of the south."

The calm prosperity of the Iowa frontier was shattered when news of the outbreak of the fighting reached the state soon after the attack on Fort Sumter. An editorial in the *Linn County Register* on April 20, 1861 reported that southern forces "are marshalling their hordes in a seditious manner, tearing down our fortifications and offering the greatest insults to our flag." South Carolina had seceded from the Union soon after Lincoln's election; Florida, Alabama, Louisiana, and Georgia followed in January, Texas on February 1. Until the Sumter attack, some still hoped for compromise and conciliation on both sides, but now war had become inevitable.

On April 15, President Lincoln issued a proclamation calling forth the state militias to suppress the insurrection. Reaction to the President's proclamation was immediate. Shortly after the call to arms, the states of the Upper South followed their sister states out of the Union. The *Linn County Register* reported that: "Already some seventy-five persons in the vicinity of Marion alone have signified their intention to volunteer under the call of President Lincoln. We are informed that the same enthusiasm is prevailing at Mount Vernon, Cedar Rapids, and other points in the county."

According to the *Buchanan County Guardian*, the response in Buchanan County was much the same. The enthusiasm grew through the summer of 1861 as numerous editorials continued to call for more volunteers. The July 6 *Register* reported that the Fourth of July celebration in Jackson Township was attended by some 2,000 people from Jackson, Boulder, and Spring Grove. The highlight of the event was an appearance by a "cavalry company seventy strong and one of infantry, fifty-six."

The following month Governor Samuel Kirkwood

authorized Congressman William Vandever to organize the Ninth Iowa Infantry Regiment from the counties of his district under the President's proclamation. Ten companies were to rendezvous at Dubuque in September, there to be outfitted and trained for military service. On August 23, Isaac Arwine, John Cartwright, Isaac N., Stephen, and Vinson Holman, Pierce Walton, and William Whisennand volunteered for three years' service. John Leatherman and Eli Holland followed their example on August 24 and August 27 respectively. Their ages ranged from 17 to 27. Caught up in the enthusiasm for a cause far removed from the daily concerns of their community, the men recruited from Buchanan County left Independence, Iowa by train on August 28, 1861. Some 2,000 people saw them off at the station with a cannon salute and martial medley provided by the Independence Band. There were crowds waiting to cheer them at every station they passed along the route to Dubuque.

On the day the men arrived at Camp Union they were divided into groups of six and supplied with cooking and eating utensils, a double woolen blanket, and a daily candle. A shortage of arms and equipment forced the men to drill with brooms, shovels, or even sticks of wood. A lack of weapons for training was not the camp's only shortcoming. One historian describes the early camps in Iowa as "hastily constructed, with little regard to sanitation." According to the *Independence Civilian*, on the other hand, "Camp Union is considered the best in the state—water is close at hand and everything is convenient." But despite the accolade, Camp Union, like its counterparts throughout the North, was rife with disease. On September 24, Cartwright wrote: "I have been sick for three or four days but I am about well now." On that same day, William Whisennand wrote to his brother that "Vinson Holman has bin sick a few days but his face is not half so long as it was." But for those who escaped illness, camp life was tolerable. John Cartwright wrote to the Peyton sisters: "I am enjoying myself very well at present and have all the time only when I have to cook or march this makes me grin."

*"one of the offalst meanist days I ever saw . . .
there was an inspection of our things but it did not
amount to nothing."*



"Refugees from southern Missouri driven from their homesteads by the Confederates encamped near General Sigel's division at Rolla" (from Frank Leslie's *Illustrated Famous Leaders and Battle Scenes of the Civil War*).

The Ninth left Dubuque September 26 on the steamships *Canada* and *Denmark* for Benton Barracks in St. Louis, where they were to remain for less than a month. The men still had not received weapons when they left Camp Union. On October 6 Cartwright wrote: "We have got our uniform but we have not got our guns yet but we are looking for them everyday." At Benton Barracks the men received "such instruction in military drill as could be given in so short a time." Finally, on October 9, they were issued guns described by one observer as "old muskets, which were undoubtedly in the Revolution, and perhaps have not been shot since." Immediately they were told to report to Brigadier General Harding at Pacific City, Missouri on the tenth. The order read: "They will take their tents with them and rations for ten days."

Ten days became three months. The Ninth camped at Franklin Junction, and its companies were detached to different points in order to guard the railroad between

Pacific City and Rolla. Company C, with the nine boys from Spring Grove, moved just north of the town of Franklin. Sometime in December new guns—the improved Minnie muskets—were issued, and for a while, at least, spirits were raised. But conditions here became no better than at Camp Union. Here, too, men sickened as the result of constant exposure and the unsanitary environment of their temporary camp. On November 21, William Whisennand wrote: "I and [illegible] and Vinson and John Cartrite and John leatherman were all sick at once and we're all at one place." On December 5, he reported: "The boys is all well except Steve holman and Vince holman they have the mumps they have bin in the hospittle 4 weeks to day I came out last Sunday." One-hundred-seventy-five soldiers in the regiment were hospitalized, mostly suffering from measles, mumps, pneumonia, and typhoid. By the end of the year, 17 of them had died and seven had been discharged due to disability.

Anxious to see action, bored by the monotonous duty in miserable weather, Vinson Holman began a diary on January 1, 1862:

"Jan the 1 1862 Was a Stormy day it Snowed Rained hailed froze and blowed

"Jan 6th 1862 was cold and it is colder than I have seen in this State . . . Some five or six of the Boys was taken down with bad Colds or something else."

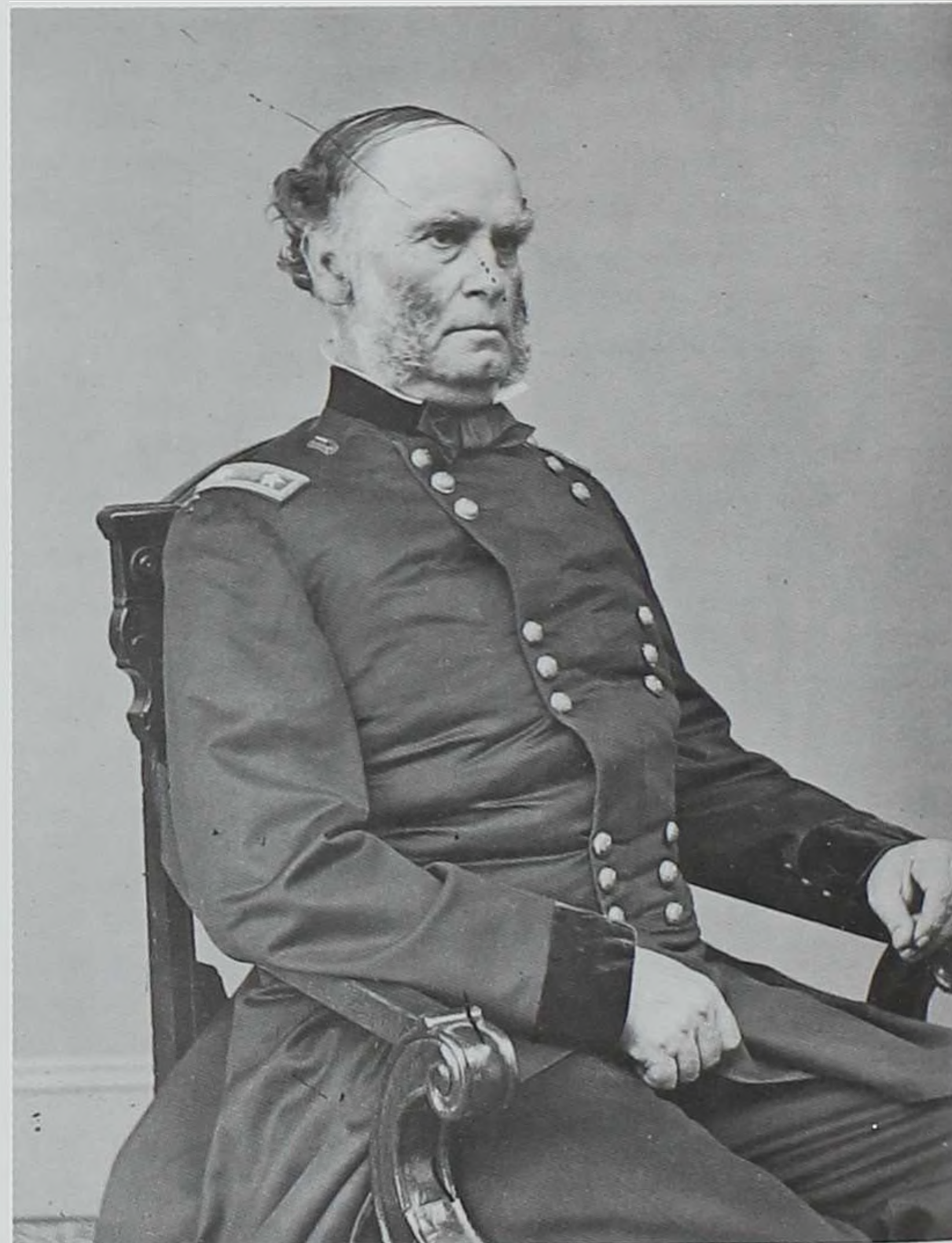
Vinson wrote repeatedly of "fatigue dity," "filling up ditches," drills and dress parades. On January 8, "one of the offalst meanist days I ever saw . . . there was an inspection of our things but it did not amount to nothing." Camp life no longer made the boys grin.

The first, faint hint of excitement came January 18 when "a Rebel fired on one of the gards but did not hurt him only the gard fired on him in return but didnt hit him." The lust for action was evident in a soldier's letter to the January 18 *Buchanan County Guardian*: "We are hoping . . . we shall hear of a forward movement soon, and I most earnestly trust we shall. Why this backwardness and delay? Are we waiting for disease to thin our ranks and paralyze our energies? Or are we waiting for our enemy to fortify and make themselves impregnable?"

Rumors began to spread about orders to move, and indeed, the regiment broke camp January 21, headed for Rolla, Missouri. The boys from Spring Grove had been together since the day of their enlistment—training together, relaxing together, caring for each other through various illnesses. Now two of them—Pierce Walton and Isaac Holman—had to be left behind in the camp hospital at Pacific City. Walton was ill with dysentery; Holman had suffered a scrotal hernia.

The troops left at 9:00 in the evening, transported by rail, and arrived in Rolla at 4:00 the next morning. The Ninth made camp a half mile south of the town. At dusk, Vinson "took a little tramp up to the Fort and on the hill. It was a great sight to see so many Tents ocipied by soldiers." Three days later, Brigadier General Samuel R. Curtis, commander of the District of Southwest Missouri, inspected the outfit and "pronounced us that Best regiment in the department of Missouri." That evening Vandever came into camp, adding to the general excitement of the rumor they were to leave for Springfield the next day.

Miles away in Springfield, the military situation was this: in December, Confederate Major General Sterling Price, of the Missouri State Guard, had taken the town with his rag-tag troops and was sitting there, awaiting reinforcements from Arkan-



Vinson Holman wrote that Union Brigadier General Samuel Ryan Curtis (above) "pronounced us that Best regiment in the department of Missouri." Curtis, from Keokuk, was elected to Congress in 1856. When the war broke out, he raised the Second Iowa Infantry and was assigned to St. Louis.

sas and Tennessee, reinforcements he could be using to overrun the whole of Missouri he had once held, and take St. Louis. Early in the war, control of the border states was crucial. The *Rolla Express* of January 27 reported Price to have between 8,000 and 10,000 men.

The opposing Union forces, under General Halleck, had been somewhat depleted by sending troops to aid Grant at Fort Donelson and east to join McClellan. Since late December, Curtis had been assembling the "Army of the Southwest" at Rolla to join Halleck and meet Price. That force now consisted of four divisions under Generals Franz Sigel and A. Asboth, and under Colonels Jefferson C. Davis (not the President of the Confederacy, but an officer in the Union Army) and Eugene A. Carr. Colonel Grenville M. Dodge, of the Fourth Iowa Infantry Regiment, commanded Carr's First Brigade, while Colonel Vandever had been given charge of the Second Brigade containing the Ninth Iowa, now commanded by Lt. Colonel Francis Herron.

Curtis's march from Rolla to Springfield began in a miserable rain on January 28. The men marched over rough roads, camped that night in a muddy field, and gathered brush to make beds. Vinson recorded each day's march, a march through alternating snow and rain, until the regiment reached Lebanon on February 5. During the march, Curtis had written to Halleck's assistant adjutant: "The Ninth Iowa has gotten over the worst of the road, having been out in the worst weather. The storms continue, but our men and animals so far bear up with great fortitude and success." According to S. H. M. Byers in *Iowa in War Times*, Curtis spoke to the troops on their arrival in Lebanon: "You have already endured much. You have moved through the coldest and most stormy period of a cold winter and brought your trains and equipment through snow, mud, floods and frosts without a murmur."

For five days the army camped at Lebanon and watched the build-up of troops and equipment for a major campaign. Halleck's desperate situation was made clear in his early February communication to Curtis: "I must leave him to you. I must leave Price to you." Now Curtis was within striking distance, his troops sufficiently strong, and he moved to take the Confederate forces General Halleck had left to him.

At 7:00 AM, February 10, 1862, Colonel Carr's forces, including the Ninth, left Lebanon for the 50-mile march to Springfield. It took them only three days. On the 12th, eight miles outside Springfield, the Union pickets skirmished with the enemy until about 6:00 PM. Hearing the gunfire, Vinson recorded in his diary that his outfit had marched two miles closer to Springfield, and he had spent the night on fatigue duty. After the build-up, Carr entered Springfield the next day only to discover that Sterling Price had evacuated the town.

Instead of trading fire with Rebel soldiers, Vinson found himself at leisure to describe Springfield: "The Town is situated on a nice piece of ground, Some nice Buildens . . . was 4 or 5 nice Buildens Busted in Town tonight. I couldnt hardly find a House that any one was living in—all deserted." The Union troops sporadically vandalized the town, but Vinson did not write that he or any of his friends had participated.

The next morning, February 14, battle-frustrated Eugene Carr began his chase of Sterling Price. He stripped his troops of tents and all unnecessary equip-

ment (which could be transported later by special trains), and with only three days' provisions, headed south. The Third and Fourth divisions, which included the Ninth Regiment, took Telegraph Road out of Springfield, toward Cassville, Missouri. At 10:00 AM they crossed Wilson's Creek battlefield and stopped for the night nine miles southeast of Springfield. They had just begun to make camp, when, according to Vinson, they received word that "Advance gards of the two Armies was Fighting." The troops, then, went another three miles, before they "laid out till morning."

The following morning Carr's pursuing troops came upon Price's deserted camp, finding several hundred huts and "Beef and corn and broken guns and wagons . . . Meet on the fire in the kettles cooking." They were close, very close, and they continued the hunt all day along a trail littered with "broken down Wagon[s] or something of there lost goods." On the third day, the 16th, they passed through Cassville and caught Price's rearguard near Keetsville, at a place called Flat Creek. Two cavalry units and some artillery engaged in a small skirmish, but the infantry, once again, did not see action. At about 3:00 PM on the 17th another skirmish occurred a mile-and-a-half from Sugar Creek, Arkansas. Carr's official report states that Vandever's Second Brigade was involved, but the men of the Ninth probably never reached the fighting. Vinson recorded only that "our advance Gards were fired on By the Rebels and had a short Skirmish . . . but routed them compleatly with but Five killed on our side."

Out of provisions, the Union troops again halted, this time for two days, remaining at Sugar Creek until Sigel's division joined them. During the wait, Vinson walked over the battleground: "I Seen Severl Ded Horses, plenty of Hats and Caps and Blood that the Rebels was Shot and other things that the Rebels lost in thair rappid flight."

Meanwhile, Price had found what he was running toward. In a deep canyon called Cross Hollow, some 12 miles south of Sugar Creek, he, too, stopped, and was joined by Confederate Generals Benjamin McCulloch and Albert Pike. Now Curtis estimated his enemy's strength to be between 20,000 and 30,000 men, but it was probably no more than about 16,000. Curtis himself commanded "12,095 men and 50 pieces of artillery, including 4 mountain howitzers," but since these fig-

*"I Seen Severl Ded Horses, plenty of Hats
and Caps and Blood."*



Union General Henry Halleck commanded the Department of Missouri. His depleted forces were reinforced when Curtis assembled four divisions, including the Ninth Iowa and the nine young men from Spring Grove, Iowa.

ures included the garrisons at Marshfield, Springfield, Cassville, and Keetsville, the actual number of soldiers available to fight in Arkansas was "not more than 10,500 cavalry and infantry, with 49 pieces of artillery," according to his report.

On February 20, the Union troops marched to Osage Springs, flanking Cross Hollow and forcing the Confederates to evacuate. Carr's division occupied the hollow on the following day and renamed it Camp Halleck. General Curtis ordered news of the Northern victories at Roanoke Island, Fort Donelson, and on the Tennessee River be announced "for the encouragement of our troops." He congratulated his men for "their endurance and heroism." They remained at Camp Halleck for just under two weeks. These were the last days of innocence, quiet days spent resting, with an occasional drill. From Vinson's diary:

"Febr 25 drilled in the Manual of arms. there was nothing of any Importance going on in Camp. We all feel fine and in good spirits.

"March 1 we had no drill today. Company fell in and went about three miles to a big Spring and took a wash..."

After abandoning Cross Hollow to the Yankees, Price and his Confederate generals encamped in the northern foothills of the Boston Mountains, south of the Union forces. Finding his own position weak in relation to the Confederates, Curtis ordered Union troops to move south of Pea Ridge and just north of Little Sugar Creek—the First and Second Divisions under Sigel and Asboth, and the Third Division under Davis. The Fourth Division, under Carr, he kept with him at Cross Hollow. Spreading the troops out would keep him from being flanked as he had done to Price earlier.

On March 4, Curtis ordered Colonel Vandever to take an expedition toward a small village called Huntsville. His force consisted of "350 of the Ninth Infantry, 150 from Colonel Phelps' Missouri regiment, one battalion of the Third Illinois Cavalry, one section of the Dubuque Light Artillery, and one section of Bowen's mountain howitzers." According to Vinson, March 4 was a "tolerable cold day." The troops began their march on short rations over 18 miles of the "roughest Country that I ever saw in my life" at six in the morning. By nighttime, without tents or shelter, they were miserable. Up at three the next morning, by five they were on the march again, 15 more miles to Huntsville. There they stacked arms and rested for three or four hours before launching forth to take "some Secesh prisoners and horses and two Secesh flags and Started back for our old Camp at Town some 4 miles we hav road back and camped the night without our tents or any Shelter... Cold tonight. Provisions very scarce rough time no excitement in camp."

Meanwhile, the Confederate Army, too, had begun to move. At 2:00 in the cold night of March 5, Curtis received word at his Union headquarters in Cross Hollow of the "rapid approach of the enemy to give [him] battle." Immediately, he ordered Sigel, Carr, and Vandever to Sugar Creek. Having spent two full days on a wearying march, Vandever got the order on the night of March 6. The maneuvering, with its long marches, took its toll on the troops. As Vinson recorded: "... We got up about three oclock and started about four oclock in the morning and travled all day and went 45 miles over very rocky road... Last night a dispatch came. Last night about midnight that old Price has come on to us and our men retreated back twelve miles to Sugar Creek to the Battle ground and we had to go Thoe

*"tolerable cold day. . . . roughest Country
that I ever saw in my life"*

made it very hard on us. We at last reached the Camp as tired and Stiff as a foundred horse with the rheumatism . . . there are some excitement in camp. Laid out last night on the ground without no Shelter and Snow and mud on us. We traveled all day without anything to eat only a little mush in the morning. hungry as hungry dogs."

Curtis, worried about Vandever's distance from him, was right when he guessed that the Huntsville "detachment will . . . be in before the enemy can reach me. We will give him the best show we can." He himself arrived at Little Sugar Creek in the middle of the afternoon on March 6, and immediately began preparation to meet the enemy he supposed advancing up Telegraph Road from Fayetteville, without waiting Vandever's arrival. The Third and Fourth Divisions were to form the left line defending Telegraph Road to the southeast of Pea Ridge and the Huntsville road, down which Vandever would come, almost due east from Pea Ridge before turning south.

At the juncture of these two roads, at the furthestmost eastern edge of Pea Ridge, sits the Elk Horn Tavern. The Union forces stored supplies and held prisoners there. The First and Second Divisions formed Curtis's right along the Leetown Road, running east-west and joining Telegraph Road three-quarters of a mile south of Elk Horn Tavern. Near that junction Curtis made his headquarters. He located the main Union camp another three-quarters-mile southwest and just north of Little Sugar Creek. By that evening Vandever was in, Sigel and Carr present, and all was in readiness to meet the enemy when he entered the Sugar Creek Valley.

But the enemy never entered the Valley. During the night, Major General Earl Van Dorn, now in command of Confederate forces, turned his troops sharply to the west, completely flanking Curtis's right. In the early morning hours of March 7, Curtis learned the enemy was advancing up the road from Bentonville to Keetsville and would be attacking him from his rear. He was trapped. Trapped, with his entire force, between the Rebels at his back and the rugged Boston Mountains dead ahead.

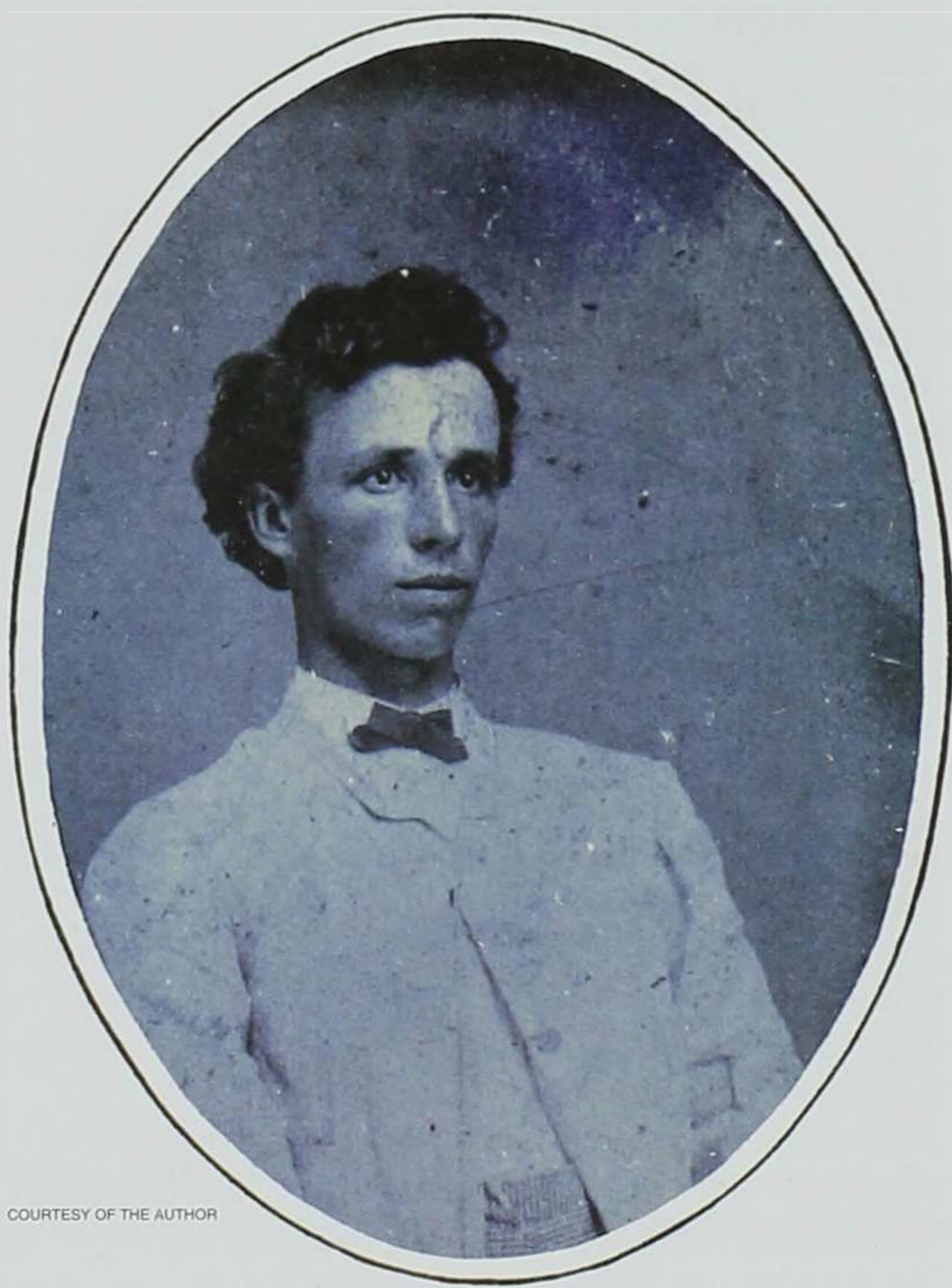
Automatically, Curtis ordered "a change of front to right on my right, my right thus becoming my left . . ." Now, the Union line stretched from Sugar Creek Valley to Elk Horn Tavern. Separated from the rugged hills by

a heavily wooded ravine called Cross Timber Hollow, the northern slope of Pea Ridge became the battleground for Confederate forces under Van Dorn and Price and the extreme Union right, defended by Carr's Fourth Division. West of Pea Ridge in the fields between the Ridge and Leetown Road, the Union left met Confederate troops under McCulloch and Pike after the latter had turned south at Twelve Corners. The waiting was over; the drilling and the marching at last culminated in a major battle; the enemy was engaged.

Carr's First Brigade under the command of Colonel Dodge met the first Confederate charge just east of Elk Horn Tavern. Around 10:00 AM Carr sent Vandever's Second Brigade up to the tavern to strengthen Dodge's left. Vandever set down his artillery "near the main road [Telegraph Road] . . . infantry forming mainly on the left . . ."

During the battle, Carr's brigades bore the brunt of the enemy attack. For nearly seven hours the fighting dragged on around Elk Horn Tavern and out in Cross Timber Hollow. Early in the afternoon Carr called on Curtis for reinforcements. Curtis "urged Colonel Carr to stand firm." He promised "that more force could be expected soon." But troops did not arrive soon. When Curtis discovered mid-afternoon that Sigel and Asboth on Sugar Creek had not been attacked, instead of sending them to Carr's aid, he ordered them to reinforce Davis in the center, and only if they discovered they were not needed there to go on to help Carr on the right. Meanwhile, Carr fought his pitched battle.

His men retired from the range of the Confederate battery, and there was a short lull in the fighting. Then the enemy rushed forward for another "desperate encounter" but failed to drive the Union troops from the edge of the timber they had retreated to and, instead, the Rebels were forced back. This brought another lull, a long one, while the Confederates gathered their strength for a final attack. From the tavern, Union soldiers could not see the Southern troops because of the thick underbrush. But to the right of the tavern, Dodge saw them plainly, saw them moving deliberately forward, setting up their batteries, and outflanking the Northern forces. Still, knowing how important Elk Horn Tavern was, Carr determined to fight it out, despite the heavy losses he had suffered already. The Southerners



COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

These words appear on the back of this image of Vinson Holman: "This is the man mother intended to marry but he died in the war."

charged, "swarming up the road and hollow and through the brush in front. . . ." Carr found it impossible to check the onslaught, the sheer overpowering number of the Confederate forces. He retreated half-a-mile back across the field, rallying along a fence, there finally to meet at 5:00 PM the reinforcements from Curtis he had called for what now seemed ages ago.

They fought till dark. They gained nothing but casualties on both sides. The exhausted troops fell back a few hundred yards from each other, and dropped to rest. The Confederates had taken Elk Horn Tavern and the Huntsville Road. The cost to the Fourth Division for maintaining what ground it did was very high. Of the Spring Grove boys, only Vinson Holman and Eli Holland escaped injury: "Bill Whisennand was wounded in the Shoulder. John Cartrite was wounded in the first Charge in the instep. I heard them both holler at that time. the Second Charge Isaac Arwine was wounded very bad in the Shoulder. the Ball entered the

right Sholder and lodged in the left Sholder. now at present he is in very bad misery and is thought that he wont live. He also thinks so himself. he only fired three times till he was Shot. he fell over. Boys retreated back. he looked back saw that we was retreating. he said he thought he would shoot before he started back. he got about half loaded again and ball struck him. he fell. he said he thought he was a dead man. he tried to get up. he made out to get up—Walked about one hundred yards before he got to us. then some of our Men took him to the Hospittle and now at present he is in great misery and has given up ever geting well. the Second Charge Steve Holman was wounded in the thy with a grape Shot made a very large hole. it dont seme to hurt him much. he is in good Spirits and is geting along fine at present. in the Second charge John Letherman was wounded above the ancle broke his leg and its expected that his leg will hafta come off. He is in great pain. Me and Eli Holund is the only ones that escaped a wound although they would blow my hair. There was nineteen of Company C was wounded and two kiled. with our wounded and kiled was half our Company. all fighting ceased about dusk to have a good ready in the morning everything was Silent. This is only a Sketch at that."

Sometime that evening Eli Holland and some others were sent back to the rear for food and coffee. In a letter written January 21, 1912, he described what happened to him: "When we reached the teams we first stopped to see Dr. McClure amputating a limb for some poor boy. But almost immediately the Doctor turned and picked up several canteens and handing them to me told me to go and get water for the poor wounded boys—I did so. But he set me to doing something else and so on till two or three o'clock in the morning. All this time I had not had a bite to eat. I then grabbed my gun and put on the cartredge box and started rapidly for the front but when I had dodged around and got some sixty rods away he called to me to come back. I replied to him I was under detail and must report back to the Co. To this he replied saying, I need you and detail you for duties at this hospital to assist the doctors.

"That settled the matter. You know a doctor in the regiment can detail any man from any company of that regiment when he needs help. His authority is on this line, above any officer. This will help explain to you how I came to be helping with the wounded, and later at Cassville. One thing more—When I went with the Canteens to get water I had to go to Sugar Creek. But for my life I cannot recall a single item, or event connected with filling the canteens and not until I got back to the light of the fires. You know what a march we made on the 6th of 46 miles and then on the 7th in a terrible battle

all day, the nerves strung to the highest pitch. It's no wonder to me that I got that water when I was more asleep than awake and besides it was dark and I had to go 40 rods or more over an unknown road and I believe that after I started with the canteens and got away from the light and from others that I drifted into an unconscious, or somnambulistic state, and filled those canteens all unconscious to myself and did not awake until I came to the light of the fires."

At sunrise the next morning, March 8, the Union artillery opened fire on the enemy. Curtis had moved the First and Second Divisions to new positions just west of the Telegraph Road. The Union line was now continuous and facing the northeast. Under heavy artillery cover the left wing moved forward and began to ascend Pea Ridge. Then, Curtis ordered a general attack. At noon, the Confederate line broke, apparently retreating north up Telegraph Road toward Keetsville. General Sigel pursued them, but it soon became clear that the Confederates had made their escape to the east and south down the Huntsville Road.

During the final advance, Colonel Carr reported, his division "did not come into contact with the enemy." Vinson described the second day: "early in the morning. We marched out to where they was to give them some more pills. which we did Old Segal about eight o'clock opened his Canons on to them. they commenced on us and fought like tigers The Iowa Ninth stood in line all day. They was cut up shamefully the day before. We had orders not to fight any that day without exstreme necessary. We fought on till about noon. then old Price begain to think his days few and scatrting so he broke ranks and ran like a grayhound and old Segal after him." The battle was over. The Rebels were routed.

How did it happen that the Confederate Army, later famous for its tactical brilliance in the face of overwhelming numbers, now so superior in numbers, lost the Battle of Pea Ridge? To begin with, Generals McCulloch and McIntosh were killed on the first day—March 7—destroying the morale of troops who, like their Union counterparts, were already exhausted by three days of marching on rough terrain with very little to eat. Finally, the Rebels simply ran out of ammunition. On the morning of March 8, Confederate

General Martin E. Green, commander of the Southern supply train, started toward Elk Horn Tavern, but received orders to take his supplies to Elm Springs and await further instructions. This mistake proved disastrous for the Confederates.

But the Union Army paid dearly for its victory. Curtis's troops suffered some 1,300 casualties. Carr's Fourth Division lost nearly twice as many men as any other—682. The Ninth Iowa sustained the highest losses of any regiment on the field—of 560 who went into battle, 218 were reported killed, wounded, or missing, a casualty rate of approximately 40%. Colonel Dodge's Fourth Iowa lost 160, his regiment having fought side by side with the Ninth in the attempt to hold Elk Horn Tavern. The Spring Grove boys had indeed received "the baptism of blood."

For a week following the battle, the Spring Grove boys remained at Pea Ridge. They had grown up together, become soldiers together, and faced battle together. Now they faced suffering and death together. On March 10 Vinson reported that the wounded were being moved to Cassville. "I am still in Camp waiting on Arwine and the Boys that is wounded." Spirits were high in the first exhilaration of victory, but as the days went on, Vinson wrote only of the misery and death around him.

"March 10 There is any amount of legs, arms, Hands lying around in Camp that had to be cut off on account of thair bons being broken . . . I hope to god that I won't have to Witness the same again. it is to horable to think of . . . Still Dying evry day.

"March 11 Men still Dying evry day. evry where is Blood and dead Men. I dont know of any excitement in camp . . . the wounded has nothing to lie on but leaves and rocks and nothing to eat but some Brisket made with water and some coffee without any cream and cornbread not lite. it looks hard for a sick man to eat such victuals but could not be helped—I am going to stay with Steve and Bill and the Boys and take care of them

"March 12 the Doctors are stil taken Legs and Arms off evry day there is no excitement . . . Arwine is in great misery and isent expected to live."

On March 13 Vinson watched helplessly as his brother-in-law died: "March 13 today about eleven o'clock Arwine died. We laid him on a hard board out of doors and Buried him about three o'clock. We put a cople

"he was very sorry that he could not get home once more but he said it was the fate of war and his time has come and he must go."

*"happiest hours I ever had
was with the Spring Grove singers."*

of blankets around him and put him in a big grave and covered him up. it looks hard but cant be helped. We had no boards to make any kind of a box. there wasent no Man that suffered any more while he lived—his pain was so great that it gave him the lock Jaw—he was in his rite mind all the while—half of his breath came out of the wound on his back—he smelt awfal—it was enough to make any body sick to be around. He wanted the Doctor to give him something to ease him and put him to sleep so he would never wake up again. he said he was very sorry that he could not get home once more but he said it was the fate of war and his time has come and he must go. he got so along towards the last that he could not spit nor swallow on account of the lock Jaw. I dont bleive he would have suffered any more if he had been burnt up."

On March 15 Vinson left for Cassville, Missouri "with Stephen and some more wounded Soldiers . . ." For them the "baptism of blood" continued. Evidence Vinson's angry outburst that day: "We came to Cetsville [Keetsville] that night and stoped for the night and some of the Boys and Steve had to lie in the Waggons all night it is redicklous how Bad the wounded is taken care of perhaps the Doctors wont look at a Man for four or five days . . . We had nothing for the wounded to eat only a little Bread."

When they arrived in Cassville the next day, Vinson noted the wounded had been given 60-day furloughs. On March 17, John Cartwright left for Iowa. He would never reach Spring Grove. On April 26, he would die in Dubuque of gangrene. William Whisennand, Vinson's cousin, did not even make his furlough—he died at Cassville on March 27. The weeks spent watching the death and agony around him took effect on Vinson. He tersely reported Whisennand's death: "March 27 William was very bad all night and suffered great pain. This morning about 6 o clock he Died. We washed him and laid him out and was Buried this evening about three o clock and that was the Last of him. Nothing more today." John Leatherman and Stephen Holman got their furloughs. Wounded, disabled, veterans now, they went home.

The Ninth did not see action again until December, 1862. The troops spent the spring at Cassville, and five months at Helena, Arkansas, while the regiment was brought back to full strength.

The battle at Pea Ridge came six months after the nine boys from Spring Grove had left Dubuque "to whip

the Secesh." At a terrible cost, they had helped to save Missouri for the Union. The fighting on the border of Missouri and Arkansas had left three of the nine dead and three disabled. Isaac Holman and Pierce Walton had not even made it to the battle. Left behind with disabling illnesses, they were finally discharged on May 22, 1862 and April 2, 1862, respectively, without having recovered from their sicknesses. After the furlough, John Leatherman, wounded at the battle, was discharged October 17, 1862, and Stephen Holman, recovering from his wound, rejoined the regiment in July. For him—along with Vinson Holman and Eli Holland—the war continued. Vinson Holman would die on December 7, 1863, in Memphis, after nearly two months of hospitalization for jaundice. Surely, for the five survivors, scarred physically and mentally, life would never be the same.

These young men sacrificed much to go to war. The difficult question is: exactly what led them to volunteer? Their families for the most part followed the usual pattern of migration to Iowa: three came from Kentucky through Indiana; two from Tennessee through Indiana; one from Pennsylvania through Ohio; and one from Vermont through Ohio. Their fathers were small farmers, fairly prosperous ones, able to pay cash for the land they purchased. Only Isaac Arwine emigrated alone and did not buy land. Except for Pierce Walton, and possibly Arwine, they were all literate.

We do not know what political party their fathers belonged to, but they all migrated from historically Democratic areas. Lawrence and Union Counties in Indiana and Allen County, Ohio usually produced heavy Democratic pluralities until 1865. Some members of the Holman family had been and continued to be active in Democratic politics back in Indiana, but if either Henry or Nathan Holman was a Democrat, he certainly was no active Democrat. These families came to Iowa during times of momentous political ferment in the country and in the state. They witnessed the birth and rapid growth of the Republican Party. By the spring of 1858 Spring Grove Township had already given its "usual majority to the Republican cause." Newton Township moved more slowly into the Republican column. The Democrats received a small majority of the votes in the October, 1858 election, but the Republicans changed that

a year later, winning by an almost equally small majority. In 1860 both townships returned Republican majorities—by 21 and 26 votes, respectively.

Existing letters and Vinson Holman's diary show how large a part religion played in Spring Grove life and how strong was the feeling of community among the people. With no major town in the area to draw them together, the churches provided the one sure community bond. Before, during, and after the war, the community's young people met on Sunday evenings at the Christian Church to sing. On February 23, 1863, Vinson Holman wrote to his cousin, Nathan Whisennand, about a "singing Fesst" in Spring Grove: "you must keep up that golden sircle Till we all git Back There Then we will kill the fated calf." Stephen Holman wrote that the "happiest hours I ever had was with the Spring Grove singers." William Whisennand wrote to his brother and sister-in-law from Camp Union that he wished he could be there to hear the Sunday preaching. But perhaps it is what the young soldiers do not write that is most telling. None of the boys mentions any of the activities usually associated with young soldiers away from home for the first time—gambling, drinking, womanizing. Throughout most of the Pea Ridge campaign supplies were short, but at no time did Vinson write of stealing anything, even from the enemy.

Abolition, the burning moral issue of the 1850s when these young men arrived in Iowa, would have been kept constantly before them by growing conflict between the Republican and Democratic parties. The presence of the Hoover Church, whose members were active abolitionists, may have influenced some of the men. Strong condemnations of slavery appeared often in area newspapers. Editor J. Rich, in the first issue of the *Quasqueton Guardian*, December 13, 1856, announced the paper would be "devoted to the interests of the Republican Party" whose "fundamental principle, non-extension of Slavery, is a principle of Right and justice, and must Triumph." Rich hammered away at this theme for nearly two years in *Quasqueton*, and continued to do so when he moved the paper to Independence in 1858 and renamed it *Buchanan County Guardian*. The *Cedar Valley Times* and the *Linn County Register* also supported the Republican Party and opposed slavery. An editorial in the *Register* on April 20, 1861 urged all able-bodied men to take up arms against "... the gigantic sin of slavery

holding, before which all other sins pale in comparison." Such editorial appeals were couched in a moralistic language designed to stoke righteous fires. Attacks on Republican "nigger-lovers" in the area's two Democratic papers—the *Independence Civilian* and the *Cedar Rapids Democrat*—seem tame by comparison.

How each of the nine young men responded is a purely speculative question. As we mentioned earlier, with the exception of Eli Holland writing of saving "the nation from the slave ologarchy" years after the war, the cause was never mentioned favorably in either their letters or Vinson's diary. In truth, most references to the Blacks are negative. In a letter dated August 5, 1862, Stephen Holman wrote bitterly of the "40,000 contrabands" now following the army. He says: "... we could of had the money that has been expended for there support and armed more troops." The only trace of simple acceptance of abolition appears in a letter Holman wrote in response to Jane Peyton on September 1, 1862: "You spoke of the Negroes. I have a few words to say. I endorse your sentiment but I fear they will get up north."

During the 1840s and '50s many people in the North, especially in the Northwest, opposed slavery not out of sympathy for the slaves, but because the expansion of slavery threatened their dream of acquiring western land. They thought the small, independent producer the backbone of the nation, and they feared the expansion of slavery would force the small farmer out of business. The Free Soil movement reached its peak in the years immediately before the war and might well have influenced these young men, coming as they did from pioneer families who had been moving ever westward.

In light of their own words, however, the principal reason they went to war seems to be their belief in the sanctity of the Union. William Whisennand wrote on October 25, 1861: "I am Determin to keep that Star Spangled banner whear it has stood ... if I see that the Stars and Strips are to fall I am willing to put all the help to the assistance that is in my power ... this is whear all true hearted men will stand that is willing to come out and do servis for his Country"

Stephen Holman wrote on May 3, 1863: "I am waiting impatiently to get revenge for the men they have

"I am Determin to keep that Star Spangled banner whear it has stood ... this is whear all true hearted men will stand"

killed of ours But I will not say get revenge this is what is carrying on this war I hope there will be no more getting revenge and Retaliation But united on one word the Union Forever."

In his letter of January 21, 1912, Eli Holland wrote about his experience at Pea Ridge for "your [John Leatherman's] children and grandchildren and [to] give them an idea what it all ment to save the nation from the slave ologarchy of the south and preserve the union and the old flag from dishonor." In two other letters he wrote of "remaking and redeeming the Republic."

The first page of Vinson Holman's diary offers the following evidence:

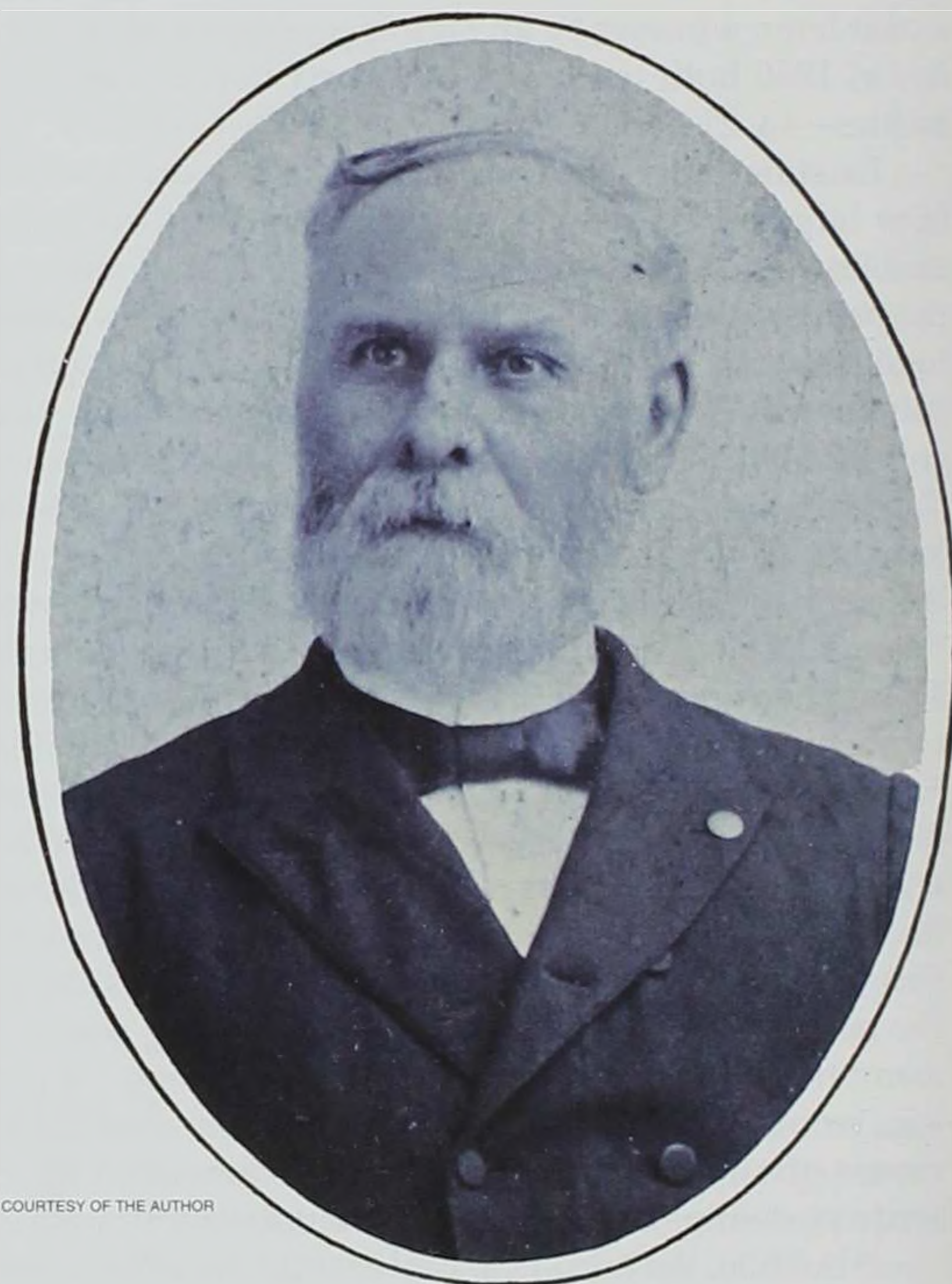
The Star Spangled Banner
O Say can you See
By the dawns early light
What so proudly we hailed
At the twilight or last gleaming
Whose red Strips and bright Stars
This is My moto
Forever it shal Wave O
Them

On the second page Vinson described his feelings in the strongest possible way:

The War for the Union
That flag is our Liberty
For ever it shal Stand
Long as the Blood flows in these
Arms of mine.
That is the Star Spangled Banner
Them Strips I have fought under
And may I do it again.

For that reason, to preserve the Union and the nation they loved, nine Iowa boys left their families, their friends, and the security of their homes in the fall of 1861. True, for the five who returned, life would never again be the same, but surely they also had the great satisfaction of knowing they had accomplished what they set out to do.

Soon after the end of the war, the five survivors were reunited in Spring Grove. Pierce Walton, the first to return, in April, 1862, had attempted to enlist in the Ninth Iowa Cavalry, but was rejected because of his poor physical condition. Toward the end of the war, he was drafted into the 15th Iowa Infantry Regiment, but served only two weeks on active duty in Georgia before a recurrence of his old injury forced him into the hospital.



COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

Eli Holland, age 55, three decades after the Civil War. As a Methodist minister in Kansas, he stayed in touch with his comrade soldiers from Spring Grove.

He was discharged on June 2, 1865. Back in Spring Grove once more, he went to work on his father's farm. In February of the following year, he married Louisa Ramsey Holland, Eli Holland's widowed sister-in-law.

Like his friend and comrade before him, Isaac Holman came home to the family farm and married soon after his discharge in 1862. In October, 1865 he bought 80 acres in Newton Township and settled down to raise his growing family.

John Leatherman had come home in the fall of 1862, his body "nearly wasted away." For several months he remained bedridden at his mother's home, but like Pierce Walton, he was anxious to return to the war. After working as a hired man in the Spring Grove area for nearly a year, he enlisted in Company D of the 47th Iowa Infantry Regiment in May, 1864, served his 100 days, and was mustered out September 28, 1864. For years, he continued to work as a farm laborer, before he got married January 1, 1869.

While home on leave in the spring of 1864, Stephen Holman married Mary Emma Curtis and soon afterward bought a 40-acre tract in Newton Township from his parents. In September of that year his enlistment was up, and he did not choose to re-enlist, perhaps because of his marriage, perhaps because the war and the deaths of his friends and his relatives had become too much for him. As early as July, 1862, he had written: "I and Vince [Holman] has had a good time since I got back . . . we do not enjoy ourselves as when all the Spring Grove boys was with us." In the same letter he says he has "lost all hopes the war closing soon." Nearly a year later he wrote from Vicksburg: "I have stopped most all correspondence where I once lived in happyness Springgrove forsaken a great many of my true friends and been forsaken." In describing the fighting around Vicksburg he wrote: "there war only 27 of that Company of us that left Independence in the Battle and there was Eight of them killed and wounded." In the fall of 1864 Stephen Holman came home for good.

At war's end, Eli Holland was the only Spring Grove boy left in Company C of the Ninth Iowa Infantry. Now deaf in one ear, Eli came home sometime in late 1865 or early 1866, having worked in Chicago for some months after his discharge "caring for some sick comrades and taking them by street cars to or near the depot." In Independence, on July 1, 1866, he married Anna Sargent. The last home, he was the first to leave. In July, 1867, he buried his young wife in Paola, Kansas. Eli Holland spent the rest of his life as a Methodist minister in various Kansas towns, but he never lost touch with his old friends in Spring Grove. He carried on a life-long correspondence with John Leatherman, and he returned at least once, in August of 1899, for a reunion of the old Ninth.

Gradually the settlement known as Spring Grove disappeared. By the 1870s two small towns had grown up to take its place—Troy Mills and Walker. Very soon Spring Grove would be no more than a township name in Linn County and a pleasant memory for five men who had grown up there together. Whether out of a desire for more or better land or whether the age-old desire to move West came upon them, the men began to leave their homes much as their fathers had left Indiana and Ohio for Iowa. The old ties were slowly broken. In 1875 Isaac Holman's wife died. Six months later he remarried and moved his family to a farm near Center Point, Iowa. Sometime in 1877 the family moved to Monona County in far western Iowa.

In 1880 Pierce Walton took his wife and eight children to Davis County, Kansas, where he spent the rest of his life. Sometime in 1883 Stephen Holman with his

wife and three sons moved to the Dakota Territory. Of the nine who had gone off so proudly together, only John Leatherman remained. He died in Troy Mills on November 26, 1912.

They had come together to a new land in the decade of the 1850s. They had felled the timber, plowed the fields, worshipped their God, and helped build a community together. The heritage of America was very deeply a part of them with roots going back to before the Revolution. When war came, threatening the nation they loved so dearly, they did not hesitate to volunteer—they did not hesitate to fight and die for their country. After the war, the survivors slowly drifted apart, but surely each one carried his memories of a place called Spring Grove and of the friendship between nine young men who had boarded a train together on a hot August day in 1861 with the sounds of a brass band and the cheers of their neighbors ringing in their ears. ❖

This piece first appeared in the May/June 1979 Palimpsest. Its author, Sharon Ham, received an M.A. in history from the University of Iowa.

NOTE ON SOURCES

Many sources have entered into the preparation of this article. Among the primary materials consulted, the diary of Vinson Holman, and the letters of the Holmans, John Cartwright, Eli Holland, Dick Peyton, Absalom Peyton, Micajah Peyton, and William Whisennand have been most important. Additional primary sources include military records, pension records, county land and marriage records, state and federal census records, and church records of the Disciples of Christ Church, Troy Mills. Contemporary newspapers were consulted, and personal interviews with Mr. and Mrs. Walter Baty, Mr. Ross Cherry, Mrs. Lowell Dudley, Mrs. Donal Graham, Mrs. Dean Hoover, Mr. Emory Melton, Mrs. Ethel Schantz, and Mrs. Wilma Walton proved very helpful.

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An annotated version of this article is on file at the State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City).